"Some Trade Comments on FM"

Prepared by Edward L. Sellers
Director, FM Department, NAB

WHAT OTHERS ARE SAYING AND DOING ABOUT FM

"The general feeling in the industry," reports the BUFFALO EVENING NEWS,"is that the advent of television took the spotlight from FM but that FM will come into its own. The fact remains that reception in frequency modulation is completely free of interference, even in the most difficult locations. The Rural Radio Network has built a wide audience in the rural areas with programs appealing to farmers. Educational and cultural, as well as lighter programs, have proved their value on a network scale."

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According to ROBERT J. DEAN, president, KOTA AM & FM, Rapid City, South Dakota, "the growth of FM acceptance in this area has been largely due to the determined promotion on the part of management and staff alike -- and to our firm belief that the system is here to stay and that it should be treated as a separate service -- not as a poor relation -- that it is a service second only to the fundamental service AM renders through local and national programs. We have kept a running account of the purchase of FM sets and have made two surveys in this area in regard to FM. One was with the dealers, themselves, on sales, and the other was a card survey, using the phone book as the mailing list. We found that about 20% of the radio homes are FM-equipped and that ties in pretty well with the dealers' reports, which indicate that about 14,000 FM sets are within the reach of our service -- after a year of promotion." [More details will be given on KOTA-FM promotion in the near future. It's a real success story]

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Several issues back BILLBOARD MAGAZINE carried this story in the Radio-Television section: "While other station managers are relinquishing FM licenses, PAUL A. LOYET, vice-president and general manager of WHO, Des Moines, stated last week that he has great faith in the future of FM and that in August WHO-FM would increase its power from 5,000 to 50,000 watts. At the same time, WHO-FM will start operating with a program schedule that will not completely duplicate AM shows. Loyet said he believed that because of its signal superiority FM would eventually replace AM. Indicating a belief that FM shows could be sold on the strength of circulation, he stated that surveys have shown that when the new transmitter is put on the air, 15 per cent of the radio sets in his 100-mile coverage radius would be FM. With about 400,000 radio homes in this area, he stated, FM audience would have a commercial value for sponsors. When the new transmitter is put into operation, a new rate card for the FM station also will be put into effect. This will call for time charges about 10 percent of the WHO basic hourly cost of $520.

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GLENN H. BROWNING, radio engineer and manufacturer of electronic apparatus, asks "Do you remember the fight against AC? One of the keenest industrial battles was waged against the introduction of alternating current. Our great American public has a wonderful way of demanding and getting what is new and better. The profits of industry have always gone to those who implemented the expansion of improved methods and services--not to those who clung to the old, and stood against the tide of progress. Why should we settle for less than the best means of audio broadcasting? It is admitted that FM has the advantages of 1) freedom from interference, 2) better fidelity, and 3) greater dynamic range. Why, then, are the advantages of FM being

questioned now? The only reason is that FM has created a problem of economics, due to the fact that stations are not deriving additional income from the simultaneous broadcasting of their programs by FM and AM. But this is not a problem that is beyond the resourcefulness of the broadcasters. Surely they can find a way to make the advantages of FM available to the American public."

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"If the earlier hopes of FM enthusiasts had been realized FM would today be the dominant medium of aural broadcasting," FCC Vice Chairman PAUL A. ALKER declared in a recent address. "And it would be an aural system," he went on to say, "noted for high-power, high-fidelity and freedom from interference. It would be the kind of an aural system that could grow side by side with television. /At another spot in his talk, Commissioner Walker pointed out that "FM can be built into television sets by the manufacturers at a comparatively low cost -- which cannot be done with AM."/ It would be infinitely superior to AM which is being steadily degraded by the addition of new stations which can only be put on the air at the expense of the existing stations.

"As far back as 1940, the Commission had this to say of FM:

"'.....Amplitude modulation stations in the standard broadcast band may be required indefinitely for the purpose of giving widespread rural coverage. For coverage of centers of population and trade areas, the new class of station offers a distinct improvement.'

"And in 1945 in establishing the new FM band, the Commission said:

"'In making an allocation for FM, it is the Commission's purpose to make provision for a service which will not be simply a new and improved broadcast service but which will be the finest aural broadcast service which is attainable under the present state of the radio art.'

"I am persuaded that time is working on behalf of FM and that it will continue to move ahead."

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ELLIOTT M. SANGER, General Manager, WQXR AM & FM, expressed his views on FM in the NEW YORK TIMES as follows: "To paraphrase Shakespeare, every few weeks, somebody 'comes to bury FM, not to praise it.' There have been so many obituaries that there has been little opportunity to examine the condition of the corpse. There has been a lot of wishful thinking on the part of FM station owners which is just as extreme as the pessimistic accounts of those who, for one reason or another, see no future in FM broadcasting. As usual, neither of the extremes is correct, and the truth lies somewhere in between. . . One of the real weaknesses in the situation is the apparent unwillingness of radio manufacturers to promote the sale of FM receivers. Most of them are so carried away by the easy sales for television sets that they have neglected the less glamorous FM market. When the going gets little harder in the sale of television sets, perhaps the manufacturer will then turn to FM. . . FM broadcasting is certainly no royal road to profit. But the fact that New York has so many hundreds of thousands of FM sets /616,900 as of April, 1950, according to PULSE/ is an indication that an audience can be built up if broadcasters will do good programming and the manufacturers will make good sets at reasonable prices and really try to sell them."

MICHAEL R. HANNA, General Manager of the eleven-station Rural Radio Network, reaffirmed his belief in FM when, in announcing RRN's affiliation with WQXR-FM, he said "We have always conceived that FM is a specialist. Programs make transmitters successful. In taking this step, we feel that FM is being given its best chance since Major Armstrong introduced it. We intend to back this move with one of the most intense promotion campaigns FM has ever enjoyed. It is ridiculous to assume that the closing of a relative handful of FM stations across the country symbolizes the failure of FM. FM has not failed. Some broadcasters have failed to realize its possibilities."

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What about this FM thing? What cooks here? Should we close our FM station and save a few nickels and perhaps live a little longer? CECIL D. MASTIN, General Manager, WNBF (AM-FM-TV), asked himself these questions, then decided to find out. "So," says Mastin, "on our FM station, starting April 9, 1950 through April 27, we carried this announcement:

"'WNBF will decide next week whether or not to continue its FM system. Write WNBF-FM, Post Office Box 48, Binghamton, telling us of your use or dependence upon our FM system.'

"What happened? 637 replies. 482 replies from New York State, 155 replies from Pennsylvania, and more were coming in, in spite of our announcement on April 27th:

"'To all FM set owners who are waiting for the results of our FM survey. We are happy to announce that, due to the satisfactory volume of mail response from our FM audience, WNBF has decided to continue with a duplication of its AM programs over WNBF-FM. We thank you for your help in our investigation, and hope you will continue to register your FM sets with this station, so that we may have first-hand data on the continued growth of our FM audience.'

"What did they say?

"431 said they used FM exclusively day and night.

" 65 said they used FM at night.

"179 complained of 'hash' on the AM band.

" 63 mentioned desire to get CBS service.

" 43 indicated recent purchase of FM sets.

" 9 spoke of shopping in Binghamton

" 9 advised us to discontinue AM.

"Where are those listeners in relation to Binghamton? Great majority from 25 to 50 miles away. Their complaint -- no satisfactory AM service by any AM station at any time. Frankly, I do not know what this survey represents, viewing it as a sample of probable listeners. Surely it isn't 100 per cent; most likely not 50 per cent, and I presume substantially 20 per cent. It does indicate to us a bonus audience to our AM coverage of up to 12,000 listeners. If not that, a substantial amount in any event. So -- perhaps -- maybe -- the FM nag is getting out of the starting gate. Will she overcome her handicap? Who knows! Anyway, we will continue to ride not one, not two, but all three: AM -- FM -- and TV!"

The report of a recent death of an FM station in the columns of GEORGE E. CONDON, Radio-Television Editor for the CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER, drew some thoughtful letters from listeners and readers. Especially interesting were the comments of ROBERT M. BEER, Manager, WTAG, Ashland, Ohio. Beer wrote: "Your column told the truth, but it leaves the impression that FM is doomed. I still have faith and here's why. . . Metropolitan stations in particular never have given FM a chance. They failed to give it any kind of promotion. Either they duplicated AM programs or staffed their stepchild affiliate with one or two men and a library of 78s and 33s. . . Television has stolen the show, as we all know, and TV is going to give nighttime radio an awful kick in the pants. There are only two ways to compete with the new medium. With the exception of clear channel stations, darkness brings on added interference that particularly hurts the low-powered AM outlets. If the victims of this situation would let FM come to the rescue they might salvage something from the wreck. However. . . extensive promotion and dealer-manufacturer cooperation would be essential.

"Surely the set builders could be induced to incorporate FM on most of their television models if sufficient pressure were brought by a faction that still has the money and influence to demand it. Therein, I am convinced, lies the future of broadcasting. TV and FM in combination! Aural broadcasters in their worst state of offensiveness never can be as bad as a poor TV program that imposes on an audience by its inherent demand for undivided attention. There is and will continue to be a place for both radio and video."

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